Special pass for Haj pilgrims disapproved by Saudi Arabia

1050. SHRI B.S. GNANADESIKAN: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether special pass for Haj pilgrims has been disallowed by Saudi Arabia making possession of normal passports mandatory for those pilgrims;

(b) if so, whether Government has requested the Government of Saudi Arabia not to implement the decision of not allowing special pass within such short time;

(c) if so, the reply of Government of Saudi Arabia in this regard;

(d) whether Government also proposes to provide passports immediately as special case to the Haj pilgrims who scheduled for the current year; and

(e) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) to (c) The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has informed all the countries, including India, that from the year 2009 Haj pilgrims should travel with international passports. The Government of India has approached the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and sought exemption for Indian pilgrims from this new procedure and allow them to travel with "pilgrim passes".

(d) and (e) Passport Offices will facilitate issuance of passports to Haj pilgrims by opening special counters during the Haj season. In addition, the Government has issued instructions of all Passport Offices to ensure availability of passport booklets to meet the additional demand during the Haj season.

However, the Government intends to approach to Saudi Authorities for a reconsideration of our request and allow the existing system to continue for one more year.

Outsourcing of passport work

1051. SHRI K. CHANDRAN PILLAI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Ministry has taken/plan to take a decision to outsource the processing work of passport to the private companies;

(b) if so, whether any company has been identified for the purpose;

(c) whether there are number of vacancies in different passport offices remains unfilled;

(d) if so, the details thereto, office-wise and category-wise;

(e) whether Government would consider filling up of these vacancies; and

(f) if so, the details thereof and if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) and (b) The Government had entrusted the National Institute of Smart